

Marjorie Dear,

.THE CHEVALS^o CHATEAU. 30th June 1916

Here we are again! This time my letter is being written far from the scenes of last year's strenuous doings. We are now on the famous River Somme and this is how we got there. You will probably remember that our Christmas was spent strafing the Hun on the Armentieres Sectors. On Jan 6th the 7th pulled out and took up lines in the Merris-Steenje area. Here we had rotten weather, (snow, blizzards and floods), and it WAS cold. The Brigade remained here until Jan 30th and then went back to the line at Ploegsteert and Le Bizet. We took part in a number of raids, and generally harassed and striped old Fritz until 11th March. The weather during this period was very tricky, snow, frosts, rain, fog and mud all doing their best to keep up Flanders' Winter reputation. Ask our Drivers how they enjoyed packing "Ammo" to the guns three nights "in concussion" per week! She was no bon, believe moi!

Our next move was to Vieux-Berquin via Bailleul. We just got nicely settled there with good weather and the prospect of some sports when the Brigade came a sudden "crash". On the afternoon of March 23rd an order came through for us to pack up "at the toot" and get on the road. Two hours was the time allowed and we did it, but gee the troops had to get a wriggle on. Owing to lack of transport a few tons of surplus gear had to be left to the tender mercies of the villagers. That night we camped near Morbecque. Hun planes stirred up the locality somewhat with their bombs, but none fell dangerously close to our lines.

The following morning after saying goodbye to our spare blanket and kitbags we started on the march South. Our destination we did not know but guessed our objective would be the advancing Huns. For five days we journeyed on, each night picqueting the horses and finding shelter for ourselves in barns and outhouses. On the morning of the second day our scurrulous rag the "Yandoo" came a "gutzer". The printing outfit had to be dumped and also the Battery Canteens. All "buckshe" carts, spare harness and other equipment had to be left behind. Never before had the 7th Brigade travelled so "light".

The further South we went, the more congested became the roads with traffic and troops. Fortunately the weather held fine. Space does not allow for a detailed account of the long march, but the chief towns and villages through which we passed were Morbecque, Aire, Lambres, Pernes-en-Artois, Valhoun, St Pol, Krevet, Doullens, Pas en Artois, Puchvillers and Behencourt. As the column neared Doullens strange sights met our eyes. Remnants of Regiments, all toil-worn and dishevelled, Batteries, gunless and practically horseless, straggled by. Often we heard this warning from the retreating troops: - "Look out Ghum, Jerry's comin'." But it was not until another 24 hours marching had been done that we actually did meet Jerry. That was on the night of March 27th. As we neared the line, streams of refugees kept passing, all laden with household goods or driving great farm carts stacked high with furniture, fodder and the family, and with the farm-yard roped to the tail-board.

Our guns went into action near the village of Heillynear the junction of the Somme and Ancre Rivers. It was there that we found Fritz. The days following found the Brigade "bogging in" for all it was worth. Of course there were casualties and we found the style of warfare vastly different to that we had been accustomed to in Flanders. For instance, there were no gun-pits, dugouts, or trenches, and the guns stood out in the open and were camouflaged when not in action. At times the layers used open sights. Soon the troops discovered that the gun possies were not the healthiest places to linger at after a shoot. Fritz had the "mad woman" habit with his Artillery, so it was necessary for the crews to scuttle for cover immediately a shoot was finished. Still there were some compensations. The country instead of being flat and uninteresting and churned up by the continuous shell-fire, as was Flanders, was beautifully fresh and green, and mostly under cultivation. The gently rolling landscape was dotted with thick woods, and in the valleys nestled villages of red-tiled and thatched-roofed cottages. The shell-holes were few and far between (at first). When it rained we forgot the beauty of nature. Our homes were holes cut out of the earth with a sheet of iron or canvas overhead to keep out the elements, (the elements generally won). When it rained the odds were that the sides of your burrow would collapse and you would be washed out. Once wet you remained so until a fine day chose to come along. The towns and hamlets close to the line had all been hurriedly evacuated by the civilians, so great was their haste that many had not time to collect the cows and chickens. However, diggers collected them instead, and for some time the camp cookhouses were filled with